

The Role of the Shadow Puppet Painting on the Ceilings of the Kertha Gosa Court

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Abstract

This article describes the role of the painting as a media in the interior placement of a traditional court building located in Klungkung, the province of Bali, Indonesia. The Kertha Gosa Court placed a shadow puppet on the ceiling of its building. This qualitative descriptive research with a historical background serves to uncover the role of the painting in that building. The painting as a media is an appropriate way to convey moral and ethic messages that could be seen throughout the time such as the one featured in Kertha Gosa. The role of the ceilings as the upper part of the building is a concrete form to communicate and deliver universal and abstract moral teachings. Ancient cultural values in Bali cannot be separated from the living values derived from Hinduism. The placement of the shadow puppet painting is closely related with the positioning of a king as God's representative in this world, serving the purpose of leading his subjects to do goodness so that they can reach the goal of life, which is to reach Moksha.

Keywords : Balinese architecture, Kertha Gosa and shadow puppet painting.

I. Introduction

The palace or Puri in Klungkung was the center of the ancient kingdom in Bali and has very high historical value in the traditional architecture. Since its construction was finished in the 17th century, the Klungkung Palace has taken the form of a kingdom nation that is ruled by a king as the sole ruler and hereditary in nature. This form of kingdom placed the King of Klungkung at the top of the governmental structure with full power in the fields of politic, socio-economic issues, religion, customs and traditions.

During the Puputan War that took place in 28 April 1908, the Dutch colonial government attacked the center of the kingdom in Klungkung, resulting in the demise of the King and all of his royal family. In this war the main building of the Puri was destroyed and only the Kertha Gosa complex was spared. As a complex, the Kertha Gosa has existed since the year 1622 *éaka* or the year AD 1700 (Warsika 1986:9). According to the data from that year, the Puri was ruled by Sri Dewa Agung Jambe, who was the heir to the Kresna Kepakistan Dynasty. This dynasty was the highest group in the royalty caste (*Ksatrya*), indicated by the title *Dalem*, which would be changed to *Dewa Agung* after the royal person became a king (Sidemen, 2001: 43).

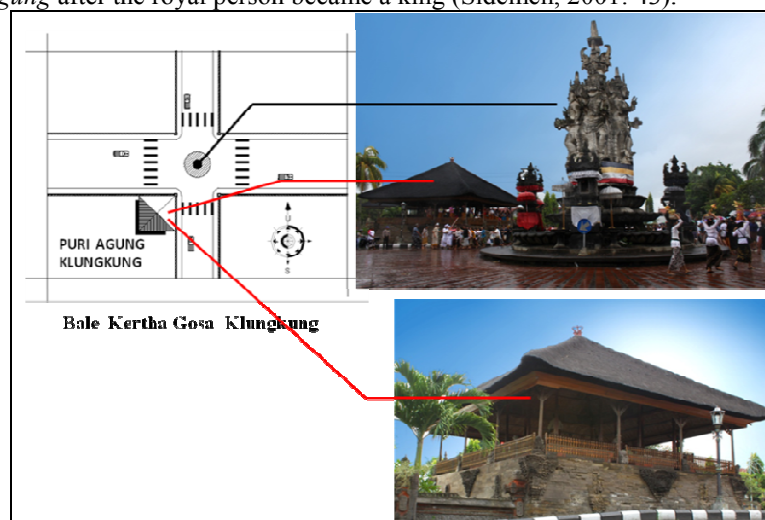


Figure 1: Locations of the Kertha Gosa Court (bottom picture) and a local landmark
Source : Field data 2009

Several literary sources note that one of the King's activities was receiving stately guests from other kingdoms, the Dutch colonial government, traders and the royal prosecutors (the *punggawas*) in a courtroom called the Kerta. The King and his family used the building to conduct the *yadnya* ritual, or a religious sacrifice, for the customary activities. After the Puputan War, Kertha Gosa was utilized only as a courtroom and during the colonial times, it was used as a bureaucratic and customary court.

The Kertha Gosa preserves several items of aesthetical heritage including the 24 *saka* poles (12 *saka* with the symbol of animals on the first floor), statues (Portuguese and Dutch soldiers and a Buddhist monk), symbols on the chairs and tables of the courtroom, and painted ornaments on the ceiling. This article elaborates one of the these features, which is the painted ornaments on the ceiling. On the ceilings or the upper part of the Kertha Gosa there are various paintings featuring shadow puppet characters, and these paintings are divided into nine rows that circle every part of the ceiling's interior.



Figure 2 : Shadow puppet paintings on the ceiling of the Kertha Gosa

Source : Field data, 2009

I.1 Statement of Problem

The placement of the puppet paintings on the ceiling cannot be considered an ordinary thing. Painting as a visual artwork usually is placed on the wall, and parallel to the eyesight for easy viewing. Ergonomically, the placement of paintings on the ceilings creates an uncomfortable perspective for enjoying the artworks, especially if the painting has a detailed character. This is especially true for a puppet painting that is usually composed of small objects, dense figures and full of beautiful details if seen from a short distance.

I.2 Research Question

According to the data above, a question arises of why the painting is placed on the ceilings. What is the connection between the function of the building as a court and the placement of the painting?

I.3 Research Purpose and Benefit

I.3.1 Research Purpose

To uncover the symbolic meaning behind the phenomena of the aesthetic elements in Kertha Gosa, and to describe the aesthetic objects present there, which includes the architecture and the painting.

I.3.2 Research Benefit

1. To understand the meaning of an artefact that is based on traditions and culture;
2. The research model could be implemented on a modern design, where the united components explain the philosophy of the building itself;
3. This research is done only to the extent of finding the meaning of the building as literature (in this context the architecture of the Kertha Gosa), and further research should be pursued on the basis of the findings of this research.
4. This building is a heritage site, hence preservation efforts need to be intensified to protect and preserve it. This article would benefit the cause by bringing attention to it.

I.4 Research Methodology

This is qualitative descriptive research with a historical background, hence it needs the correct and supporting traditional source of data from Bali such as the traditional scrolls (*lontar* and *babad*), manuscripts, as well as books and documentation photos. Traditional sources of data such as these could be accessed from local sources (from libraries within Bali or outside Bali) and external sources (libraries in the Netherlands or other countries that are connected to the history of Bali).

Another important source of data was to find the persons that have patron-client relationships with the actors in history, especially the members of the royal family and relatives of the customary court in the era of the Balinese kingdoms. The interview technique in this regard was to use open questions. The guidelines to the questions used were from perfecting the technique or adjusting from previously used guidelines.

This method aims to describe the interconnections and intertwining of all elements, such as: the concept and expression of spatial arrangement and orientation, the concept and expression of the building's layout or setting, and literary aspects of the painting which, together with other artistic works, produce comprehensive meaning. Having examined the structure of its meaning, the structure of aesthetic concepts will be analyzed in relation to Balinese culture.

Other resource persons can be categorized as informants considered capable of providing cross check information about particular matters in their fields, an expertise known to the Balinese "*wiguna*". Those people with *wiguna* include (among others): the master craftsman of traditional Balinese buildings (*undagi*), sculptors or carving artist (*sangging*), artists who paint (classical puppet *sangging* of Kamasan village), religious leaders (*pedanda*, *rsi*, stakeholders), historians and traditional Balinese literary experts (*pujangga*, humanists, literary figures, puppet masters), experts in the field *pedewasaan* (Balinese traditional dating experts - *Balian*), local government officials (*wibawa*), and the chairman of traditional villages, *klian banjar* (*sonteng*).

Hence by adopting these methods, a considerable amount of time was required for the explanatory research aimed at delving into the elements used in ancient buildings and leading to the forces that inform their shape and ornamentation, and then providing explanatory thick description to allow further research into the focus of this study.

II. Theoretical Framework

II.1 Balinese Traditional Architecture

A feature of the traditional architecture of Bali is the usage of rooms to accommodate human activities with the underlying backgrounds of religion, local customs, the surrounding environment conditions and potency. Hence it is clear that location, society and its culture are the main identities that shape traditional architecture (Gelebet, 1985:10). Balinese traditional architecture is the result of the effort to fulfill the need of space in the social, economical, spiritual and other activities. Traditional architecture is not only based on science or rational calculations, but also based on aesthetic, even spiritual calculations, as well as customary values and religious beliefs (Tim Perumusan ATB, 1984:1; Sulistyawati, 2008:10).

Palatial buildings are essentially various spaces that emerged as a result of an architecture work. Space in architecture is very important, as the main purpose of an architecture work is to create beautiful and comfortable spaces, and to fulfill a certain function. A building could be called a palace when it has uniqueness in its spaces. Cornelis van de Ven stated that 'space must be made proportional and the proportion has to come out'. The aim of architecture is to create space, hence architecture also has to originate from space (Aris Munandar 2005: 3, De Ven 1991:173). To understand the meaning of the palaces as a whole, Aris Munandar observed that 'it has to be understood first the meaning behind spaces in the palatial complex'. The unique space that is present in the palace has various meanings, often connected to a certain religious concept, especially since Hinduism in Bali is deeply embedded into the life of the society. According to Geertz, the architecture of a palace provides meeting places between the humans, the gods and the spirits. Meetings with the gods occurred in the sacred rooms; in the public spaces, meetings between the ruler and his subjects; in the special rooms, meetings between the rulers; in the residential areas meetings between members of the royal family; and in the unholy spaces, humans meet with the spirit world (Aris Munandar 2005:259, Geertz 1980:116).

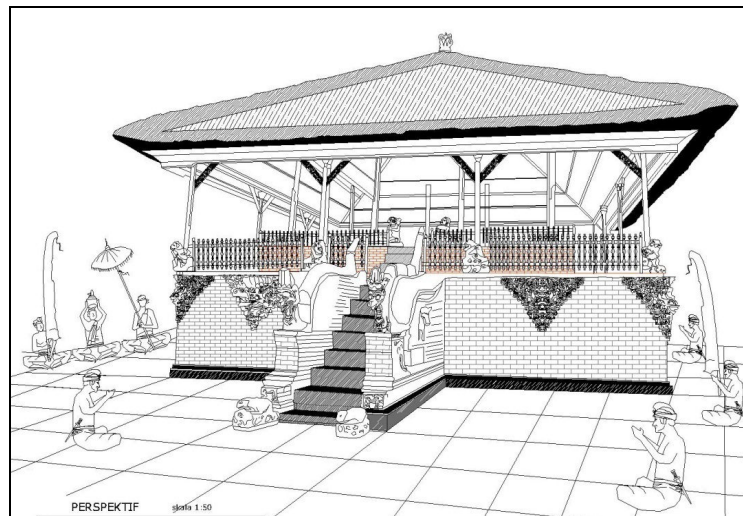


Figure 3: The perspective of Bale Kertha Gosa Court

According to Davison (1999:4) in his book 'Balinese Architecture', the tripartite division of the universe dovetails with the concept of *Tri Angga*, which assumes that everything in the natural world can be divided into three parts. *Utama*, which denotes things that are 'high' or 'above', is identified with mountains and, by extension, the gods who dwell there, heaven (*Swahloka*) and the ancestors, and all that is pure or sacred. Man occupies the middle ground of *Madya*, the mundane world of everyday existence, a hinterland that stretches from foothills of the central mountain range (*Bwuh Loka*). *Nista* devoted things that are 'low' or 'below', including the sea and the dead, the impure and the profane (*Bhur Loka*).

The human body can be similarly divided into three parts (head, torso, and feet). This tripartite scheme of things extends to the components of the simplest built structure the base, the walls or posts, and the roof.

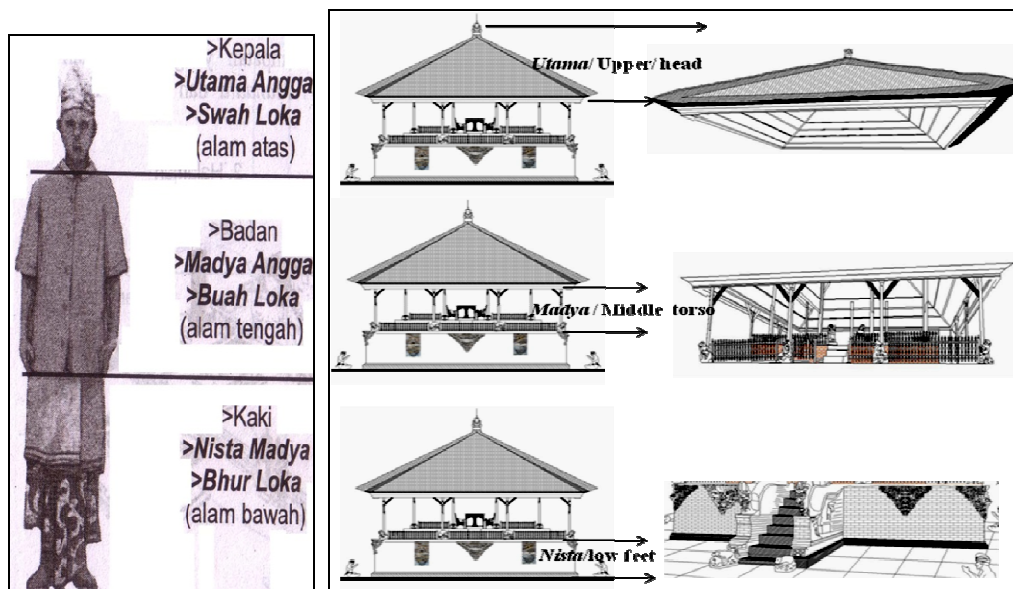


Figure 4 : Kertha Gosa is divided in three, like the human body or Tri Angga Concept

Kertha Gosa is one of the spaces within the architecture of the palace structure. In the era of kingdoms, this building functioned as a traditional court. The roof shape is that of a *wantilan* or pyramid, and the building is open and without walls. Kertha Gosa is an important feature of the Puri Agung (Grand Palace). Since the Puri was the residence of the King and his family, and since the King is a representative of God in this world, a Puri is considered to be a sacred and holy place. The words *Kertha Gosa* originate from the Sanskrit language. *Kertha* or *Krta* means good, wise, safe and prosperous; while *Gosa* (from the word *Gosita*) means being called, being announced and being broadcasted. So Kertha Gosa means a place to announce good things or to announce things for achieving safety and prosperity. Kertha Gosa could be translated as a place for the King to

host discussions that relate to the safety and prosperity of the kingdom in the realm of security and justice. The Kertha Gosa itself is a palatial complex that has the elements of recreation, happiness, luxury and as an artwork that is monumental in the kingdom. The Kertha Gosa provides us a glimpse of the process of justice as it happened in the past (Laksmi,2011:86). An annual court session occurred on the day of the *Purnamaning Kapat* (the name of a day in the Balinese calendar). Here the King as the supreme ruler gave directions as well as decisions regarding the considerations of the customary laws and religion. Every Wednesday (*Buda – Kliwon*) each month, the King held meetings with the prosecutors (*Manca*) in the Puri. Not only used for court sessions, this building was also used for *ngaturang pemijian* (eating) by the *bhagawanta* (palace priests) and the other priests when meeting with the King. This building was also used to meet foreign statesmen such as the Chinese, the Dutch, the English and the Portuguese.

The architecture of Kertha Gosa's roof form is characteristic of traditional roof shapes, being a pyramid or pyramid-shaped (Figure 4). The upper part has primary value, and as the place of the Gods and Hyang Widhi (God) is the end point of human purpose, the attainment of nirvana (heaven). From a mythical perspective, the roof or upper part represents a symbol of an agrarian society from a mythical civilization. The pointed roof at the top is a kind of natural layer above Swah Loka, symbolizing a mountain and sacred space. The existence of the painting at the top of the building relates to the theme and function of this space and its leanings towards the Divine.

2.2 The Role of the Shadow Puppet Painting in the Life of the Balinese

The shadow puppet is one of the features of Balinese culture. It is one of the culture media used by the Balinese to spread the morals and teachings of Hinduism. Shadow puppet painting in Bali originated from a village called Kamasan, located in the Klungkung regency. The art of puppet painting has flourished since the 17th century (around the year 1686) under the King's directives. These paintings have certain characteristics of color, story, theme and function. The tales that are often depicted in the shadow puppet paintings come from Hindu mythologies such as the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, and stories like *kekawin Arjuna Wiwaha*, and *Suthasoma*. These stories have aesthetic values and philosophical meanings, and they are painted on a canvas cloth (*ulon tage* cloth or *sae*), using natural dye such as *atal*, *kencu*, *ancur*, and other kinds of woods. The colors typically used are brown, black, grey, red and yellow (gold/ *prada*). The paintings have ritual functions in the same way that a national flag has. They form part of sacred artwork and *bebali*, and were only used for religious purposes and placed on the sacred buildings of the Balinese.

The word 'shadow puppet' or *wayang* is related to 'shadows' and the act of creating shadows suggest the presence of light and thus a source of light. The source of light could universally mean the sun, the fire; whereas the light or a ray symbolizes God. Without light, shadows could not be created, hence it can be said that the shadow is the creation of the universe. So shadow puppetry exists because there is light from God (Sang Hyang Widi Wasa).



Figure 5: Shadow puppet painting on the ceiling, (Bhima Sena meets the Deities from Heaven). East row no. 6 of the Kertha Gosa building



Figure 6: Gods and Goddesses painting on the ceiling, North row no. 9 of the Kertha Gosa building
Source: field data 2009

The shadow puppet tales told originate from Hindu mythologies, and they are usually told by the elders when

preparing for religious ceremonies. In times like these the elders usually impart religious wisdom and teachings through stories. Story-telling like this is considered a form of verbal culture. In the Balinese culture, communication through the verbal culture has been going on for generations and it can be considered a tradition. In every act, and especially in regard to religious rituals, the transfer of cultural values takes place through the verbal culture, and this still applies today.. Teachings in the sacred literature, the holy songs (*kidung*), and the symbols of life are conveyed and imparted (*nutur* – polite form of Balinese language), and this can occur when the people are relaxing, working in the kitchen, in the fields, or even when they are preparing for religious ceremonies.

In the context of culture, ‘tradition’ may be translated as inheritance or the continuation of norms, customs, sets of conduct and wealth. Those traditions are not something that can be changed, traditions instead are intertwined with the various human acts and upgraded wholly (Peursen 1985:11).

Humans from birth have always been exposed to the cultural values of their society, and those life concepts become deeply rooted in their mentality and perspectives, hence it is hard to simply make switches or changes with other concepts in a short span of time.

The Balinese culture in essence is rooted in the materialization of religious concepts (Hinduism) which guide human behavior. These are: the *Rwa Bhineda* - this dualistic concept is an acknowledgement of two categories that will eternally oppose each other and will always color the world, and which are exemplified by such concepts as good and bad, the sacred and the profane, and headwaters and downstream. The *Desa Kala Patra* - the concept of time-space and situation - is a contextual concept which adjusts itself to every situation; the *Trihita Karana* – the concept of harmony - is the balancing concept between human and God, human and the environment, and with other humans. It is also the life purpose of the Balinese people, which is to *Moksartham Jagadithiya ca iti Dharma* (to achieve harmony between *bhuwana alit* and *bhuwana agung*); and the *Karmapala*, which is the belief that every human thought and act will reap what they sow. Good thoughts and acts will bring good results, and vice versa (Mantra 1996:25-26). According to those concepts, the Balinese culture has the ability to preserve harmony and keep intact the development of the original culture in facing new challenges like new culture or modernization.

The paintings on the ceiling of the Kertha Gosa consist of seven stories and are divided into nine rows. Those seven stories consist of : 1. Story of *Tantri Kandaka*, 2. Story of *Atman Prasangsa*, 3. Story of *Garuda looking for Tirta Amerta* (Holy water), 4. *Palelindon* (earthquake), 5. Story of *Bhima Sena*, 6. *Story of Sorga Roh* (The soul in heaven), and 7. Story of *Dewa Dewi* (Gods and Goddesses) .

The nine rows include the stories of : row 1. Story of *Tantri Kandaka*, row 2. Story of *Atma Prasangsa*, row 3. Story of *Atma Prasangsa*, row 4. Story of *Sang Garuda looking for Tirta Amerta* (Holy water – water of life), row 5. Story of *Palelindon* (earthquake), row 6. Story of *Bhima Sena* (Bhima Sena meets the Deities from Heaven), row 7. Story of *Bhima Sena*, row 8. Story of *Sorga Roh* ((The soul in heaven), and row 9. Story of *Dewa Dewi* (Gods and Goddesses).

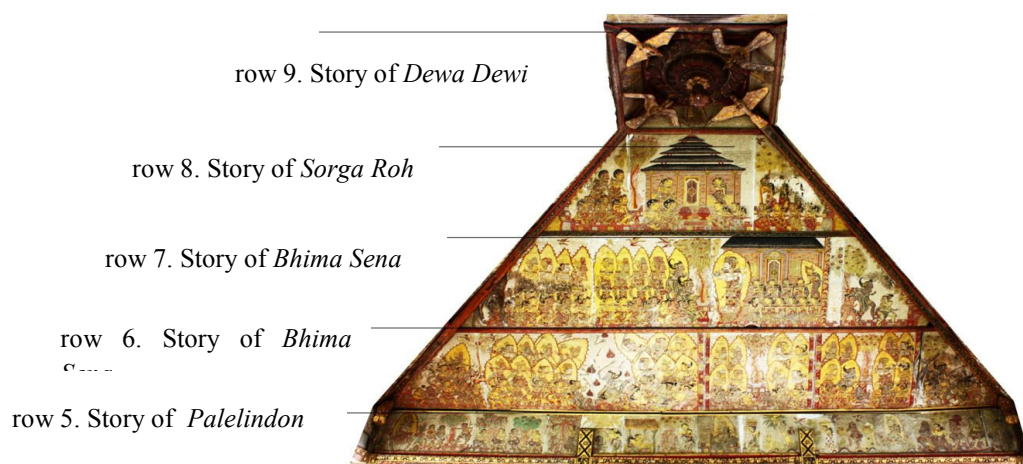


Figure 7 : The placement the nine stories
Source: field data 2009

Interviews conducted for this research suggest that the paintings should be read in clockwise direction, which Balinese language calls *pradaksina* or *purwadaksina*. *Purwa* means east and *daksina* means the journey of the sun on the south of the equator. In Hindu cosmology, the East – West compass direction (*Kangin Kauh*) is the

religious axis, where the sun rises and sets, the start of a life; whereas the North – South compass direction (*Kaja Kelod*) is the Earth's axis.

The shadow puppet stories on the building of Kertha Gosa have the main theme of *Bhima Swarga*. The core story of *Bhima Swarga* is Bhima's journey to heaven because he wants to save the souls (*atma*) of his deceased parents, King Pandu and Queen Madri, that were said not to have reached heaven. According to the story, it is said that Pandu was a good, just and wise king but, being human, he had made some mistakes in his life. Hence both Pandu and Madri had to face the consequences of their mistakes (*karma law/ karmaphala*), before reaching heaven to be one with Hyang Widhi Wasa.



Figure 8 : South row 6 – When Bhima found the souls (*atma/ roh*) of King Pandu and Queen Madri (Bhima Sena meets the Deities from Heaven)

The symbolization of *Bhima Swarga* is the suffering of the souls in hell, which describes a lesson in ethics. Through the paintings it was hoped that the people could reflect and learn lessons from the bad things that the souls (*atma*) pictured had done to be put in hell, according to the concept of *karma law (karmapala)*. The Kamasan shadow puppet painting in Kertha Gosa illustrates the concept of *rwa bhineda* – the dualistic concept symbolized by the theme or characters of the tale. The story also shows the *atma* of the characters being tortured by the guardian deity of hell, Sang Yamabala. The message of the *desa kala patra* concept can be clearly seen because of the *karma* of a person. The paintings in the Kertha Gosa building hope to inspire the Balinese to know the purpose of their lives, which is to reach *Moksha*.

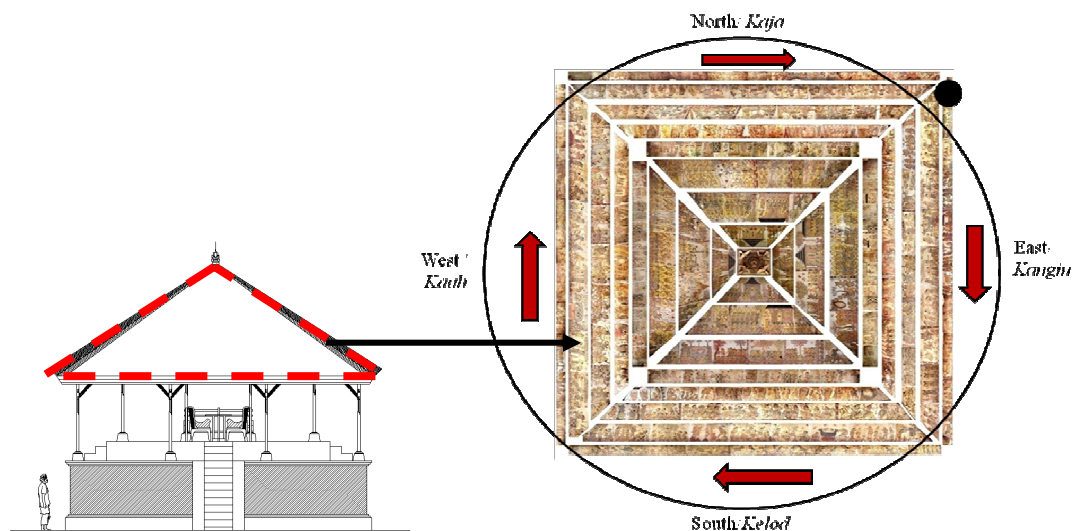


Figure 9 : The directions to read the paintings on the ceiling of the Kertha Gosa building

The *Bhima Swarga* paintings on the ceiling of the Kertha Gosa building provide us with information about the meaning of ethics in life, which is to cultivate rightness (moral teaching), and sacred teachings from God/Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa. This painting, as the media for conveying cultural values, depicts the conception of life that exists in the minds of most people regarding all that is of paramount importance or value. This cultural value system lies at the abstract level of customs, traditions, and the ideal form of culture. It has other terms to

accentuate meaning, including concepts of mental behavior and attitudes, and the concept of mentality itself. The concept of mental behavior focuses on the human individual first, then as the secondary phase, on the culture and the society of a person's environment. It is connected closely to psychology. Soul is the position of mental behavior of each individual, and it will react to its surroundings (human environment/ society or the physical nature). The mentality concept could be interpreted as the whole of the ability of the human mind and soul realm in responding to its environment (Koentjaraningrat 1994:26). Since the system of cultural values is part of the customs, it is adopted by most of society as a mental behavior, hence that behavior is only present in the souls of some individuals.

III. Conclusion

To see and read the paintings on the ceiling, one has to go round every corner of the building or ceiling in a circular movement, moving clockwise or turning to the right. Turning to the right or *Purwadaksina* is considered the life journey or start of life by the people of Hindu Bali. *Purwadaksina* is used as a symbol for the purification rituals that are directed to *Swah Loka* (heaven/ nirvana), and this circular movement has an *Utama* value. Turning to the left or *Prasawya* is the symbol of destroying or returning the *Bhuta* to *Bhur Loka*, and this movement has a *Nista* value.

Value in a work of art is something that always subjective, it will always depend on the person assessing it. In value there is also a practical context, as 'something' is considered valuable if it serves a function. Customs which manifest values have a contextual nature in meeting the practical needs and functions of life. Aesthetics exist as a life value which does not only consider artistic values or those of beauty, but moral and socio-politic values and those of religion and psychology. Therefore life values are universal, and a work of art is more meaningful if the main life values merge in a unified artistic form.

The painting media is an appropriate way to convey moral and ethical messages, and this can be seen in the way appreciation for the paintings of the Kertha Gosa building has endured through time. The ceiling as the upper part of a building is a concrete form to convey and communicate moral teachings that are eternal and abstract in nature. This research is not yet finished; there are other elements of Shadow Puppet Painting and the Kertha Gosa building that are part of Bali's cultural heritage, but have yet to be fully explored. As proposed above, in Balinese culture wisdom cannot be separated from the living values of Hinduism. The role of shadow puppet painting as part of art in the perspective of the Hindu society has an underlying, foundational place. The religious life of a Hindu cannot be separated from art, be it in the form of paintings, dances, choir, literature and architecture. The different art forms are located as the aesthetic, ethic and religious statements of devotees as offerings to God. In Balinese culture, art in any form is essentially the result of the artist's creativity, idea (*cipta*), sense/feeling (*rasa*), and will (*karsa*), hence the art cannot be separated from the cultural wisdom of Bali.

As cultural heritage, the Kertha Gosa building conveys the King's wisdom in guiding his subjects to achieve life's purpose, *Moksha*. This local wisdom, from the perspective of the study of art and design, needs to be discussed further and more seriously. Local wisdom cannot be considered as taboo, not important or old-fashioned; it can be seen as the shaping of not only an individual's identity, but also of a society. Local culture can be regarded as a 'reference' to create new innovations, with modern technology parallel to the advancement of the era. Every culture can be seen as a certain plan, a certain policy for something more dynamic. The local wisdom of the Balinese people should not be regarded as the end of a given situation, but rather as a guidance that will never stop being conveyed, communicated and passed on as the task of every generation. In life's dynamic there will always be changes, but changes should not alter the core of the tradition. The Balinese find not only perspectives of beauty in the various texts of Hindu literature, but also fear, life's mysteries and a great deal more.

We are now living in the postmodern era, so the meaning of a space's beauty may be in religiosity, or in functional beauty, or it can be, like at present, in the pragmatic. Kertha Gosa, as a place of traditional justice, was made to convey the religious values of the Balinese people, a place of awareness that our moral and ethical values in life are very susceptible to disturbance.

The Kertha Gosa pavilion is an inner dialogue of the conscience, located in the space within us. In this inner space humans wrestle with themselves when they are faced with a choice of life-options presented in the form of paintings, and with the conflicts of deciding to choose what is good and what is more correct. Movement in the way we read paintings is movement in physical space, subordinate movement at a lower level than awareness than movement in the inner space of being.

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Biography :

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